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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 003987

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SUBJECT: LY ELECTION IN SOUTH -- LITTLE CHANGE, BUT A FEW SURPRISES

REF: A) TAIPEI 3944 (AIT/K) B) TAIPEI 3917 (AIT/K)

Classified By: ROBERT W. FORDEN, AIT KAOHSIUNG PRINCIPAL OFFICER.
REASON: 1.4(B/D).

Summary

1. (C) While Southern Taiwan voted more or less as expected in the December 11 legislative election, with virtually no change in the overall Pan-Green/Pan-Blue ratio of legislative seats, there were a few surprises in individual races. Two independent candidates in Kaohsiung City who polled very high prior to the election both lost, showing how important party organizations were in mobilizing the vote in an election with very low turnout. A surprisingly strong showing by People First Party (PFP) candidates in Kaohsiung and Tainan cities was less about the PFP than about the individuals running and the methods they employed to mobilize votes. The surprisingly weak performance of the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), which lost a seat overall in the South, was due primarily to over-nomination of Pan Green candidates and poor vote allocation coordination with the ruling party. Contrary to the widespread view now circulating that the election result marked a Pan-Green setback, policy and party affiliations actually played little role in the outcomes of most of the local races in the South. End Summary.

Southern Races Overall As Expected

2. (C) In contrast to the rest of Taiwan, the southern vote in the December 11 Legislative Yuan (LY) election was very much as analysts had predicted (reftels). There was virtually no change in the ratio of seats between the Pan-Green and Pan-Blue camps. Out of the 48 seats in Southern Taiwan up for grabs, the DPP took 25, KMT 13, PFP 5 and TSU 2. While the DPP seat total remained unchanged, the KMT and TSU each lost one seat, and the PFP picked up one (two, if you count a PFP seat that had been vacant). The result was consistent with most pre-election estimates which saw the South as an area in which the Pan-Green had done so well four years ago, that it was unlikely to be able to improve on its existing 60/40 dominance of the Southern Taiwan LY seats.

Leading Independents in Surprise Losses

3. (C) There were surprises, however, in individual races. Two independents in Kaohsiung City who had polled very high prior to the election both lost. Independent incumbent LY member Su Ying-kuei, a former TSU legislator who was expelled from the TSU a year ago for accusing colleagues of corruption, had made a strong impression as a "clean political reformer" and made a strong showing in pre-election public opinion polls in Kaohsiung's northern district. However, on election day he came in eighth, with less than half the votes needed to win one of that district's six seats. In Kaohsiung's southern district, popular television talkshow hostess, Cheng Li-wen, had likewise polled well among her district's 11 candidates, only to come in seventh on election day, far short of winning one of that district's five seats. The failure of the two independents was widely seen as a confirmation of conventional wisdom that party backing is critical to mobilizing the vote, particularly in elections with low voter turnout. In the cases of both Su and Cheng, large numbers of younger voters and moderate swing-voters, who were among their strongest supporters, apparently sat out the election.

4. (C) By contrast, leading Non-partisan Solidarity Union (NPSU) candidates in Penghu (incumbent Lin Bin-kun) and Pingtung (incumbent Tsai Hao) Counties both won easily. Unlike the independents in Kaohsiung City, Lin and Tsai are long-standing local political figures with deep pockets and well-developed political networks. Both are widely believed to have links to organized crime organizations and have been linked to corruption scandals.

15. (C) The PFP did surprisingly well in Southern Taiwan, the traditional base of the Pan-Green. PFP wins, however, appear more a reflection of individual candidate appeal and of better nomination strategy, than an indicator that the South is becoming less "Green." In Tainan City, PFP candidate Kao Si-po surprised most observers with a strong win in one of Taiwan's "Greenest" cities. Kao, the 37-year-old son of KMT at-large legislator Kao Yu-jen, ran an unorthodox campaign that downplayed his PFP affiliation and targeted young people with activist campaign events replete with pop music. Despite the low voter turnout, especially among young people, Kao's approach paid off in his third-place finish. More surprisingly, Kao managed to win without doing what the KMT most feared -- undermining the two KMT candidates in the race. While the KMT candidates also won, Kao's strong finish pushed the sole TSU candidate to seventh among those vying for Tainan's six LY seats. Kao benefitted from being the only PFP candidate; in 2001 the PFP had split its votes between two candidates, both of whom just missed winning. Kao also likely benefitted from his family connections -- besides being the son of an old guard KMT figure, Kao is also married to Jessica Chou, a key aide to Taipei Mayor Ma Ying-jeou, and his sister is married to Taoyuan's KMT Magistrate, Chu Li-lun.

16. (C) The PFP also did well in Kaohsiung City, where its two candidates, both seen as competitive but falling behind in late public opinion polls, won convincingly. In Kaohsiung's northern district, PFP Policy Director, Chang Hsien-yao, won easily despite widespread criticism that he was a "carpetbagger" who moved to Kaohsiung only to run in the LY race. As in Tainan City, Chang benefited from an improved PFP strategy in Kaohsiung over that of 2001, when the PFP had spread its votes evenly in Kaohsiung's northern district, home to a large number of retired military, among three candidates. In Kaohsiung's southern district, the sole PFP candidate, Chou-yi, also easily won re-election, despite a poor showing in pre-election polls and a poor image stemming from his involvement in violent protests following the March 2004 presidential election. Both Pan-Blue and Pan-Green officials had told AIT/K before the election that Chou-yi had arranged massive vote buying through local gambling syndicates, but it remains unclear whether the allegations are true.

Pan-Green Vote Allocation Uneven; TSU Takes the Hits

17. (C) Publicly announced Pan-Green efforts to allocate votes among candidates in Southern Taiwan proved highly uneven, with TSU candidates suffering in most cases. In Kaohsiung's Northern District, vote allocation between three DPP and one TSU candidate apparently worked, with all four being elected, despite predictions that the TSU candidate would lose. In Kaohsiung's southern district, however, it appears so many votes shifted to a DPP candidate, Huang Chao-hui, identified before the election as struggling, that he ended up garnering so many votes that another DPP incumbent, Tang Jin-chuan, unexpectedly lost. In Kaohsiung County, DPP vote allocation helped ensure all five of its candidates won re-election. However, the DPP had refused to share vote allocation with the TSU, arguing -- correctly as it turned out -- that the TSU should have nominated only one candidate instead of two. As a result, both candidates lost in a surprise setback for the TSU.

DPP Luck Holds Seats in Chen's Home County

18. (C) On a straight vote in Tainan County, the DPP would have lost one seat had it not been for election rules requiring a female winner in districts of a certain size. While four of the DPP's five candidates in Tainan won easily, the fifth, Ye Yi-jin, lost by 800 votes to a KMT candidate, Guo Tian-cai. However, since none of the other four DPP, two KMT and one independent winning candidates were women, Guo was skipped over and the final of Tainan County's eight LY seats was awarded to the DPP's Ye.

Comment: Outcome in the South Not a Referendum on Policy

19. (C) Despite widespread media debate as to what the election outcome says about Taiwan voters' views of the Chen Administration, few of our interlocutors saw the LY election in "national" terms. Instead, local party officials emphasized to AIT/K that each district and each candidate presented a different set of dynamics, with party affiliation only significant in terms of access to resources and voter mobilization. Voter allocation, which many had expected to be key to either side's victory, proved to be highly uneven and unpredictable. Overall, the only factor that all of our interlocutors agreed was decisive was voter turnout. The

even-lower-than-expected 59 percent turnout seemed to leave all parties' strategies in a mess, with none particularly satisfied that the election had played out the way it had expected. Overall, the results in the South were consistent with expectations that neither side would pick up seats. However, within the individual districts, each party will be spending time trying to figure out what happened and why.

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